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THE LEGENDS OF
PARSIFAL

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The Legends of
Parsifal

By
Mary Hanford Ford



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The Legends of Parsifal



PARSIFAL has become a part of the daily life of the world, a mystery of holy living enacted before all eyes, and played upon a stage erected in each heart. Many will not be able to witness the performance of Wagner's great drama, or listen to its wonderful music, but all wish to become familiar with its story and meaning, to understand the genesis of its rich harmonies. To such waiting auditors this little book flies forth, hoping that it may have treasured and enshrined some portion of that mystic spell which for many ages has lent charm and glory to the name of Parsifal.

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It may be as well to recall in the beginning the scenes and incidents of Wagner's masterpiece, so that the connection may be more closely drawn between its achievement and the legends and poems which have preceded it in an earlier day.

When the curtain rises upon the three acts of the music-drama, the senses of the spectators have been prepared for the pictured story by the wonderfully intermingled *motifs* and harmonies of a *Vorspiel* which precedes each portion of the opera. The first of these lovely preludes ends with the exquisite strains of the Grail music, and the curtain rises upon the peaceful environment of the castle of Monsalvat, where Gurnemanz, the leader of the Grail guardians, is at morning prayer with his followers, while the trumpets sound, and the cortège of Amfortas, the wounded king, approaches. He is about to bathe in the lake, the waters of which are blessed by the beautiful swans which live

of Parsifal

and rest upon its bosom, and by their ministration assuage the suffering of the stricken monarch.

The procession halts while the king may rest, and then Kundry enters the scene, breathless from a journey upon her flying horse to far Arabia, to obtain a balsam which she hopes may bring healing to the king. She is the slave of mighty Klingsor, the magician. Long ago, in the days when Christ taught the lesson of love to mankind, she was that beautiful Herodias who laughed at the Saviour as he was bearing his cross to Calvary. As a punishment for her sin, she must wander for years, until she finds a saviour who will love her with a selfless love, and thus lift the curse from her.

She has known many sad lives since the period of her sin, and at the opening of the drama she is pathetically awakened to the horror of her slavery, and, though compelled by Klingsor to ensnare good knights, and especially the knights

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of the Grail, she snatches every free moment for deeds of mercy and kindness.

Klingsor has always been the enemy of the Grail. Years before, when it was first entrusted to King Titurel, the father of Amfortas, the magician swore to become its possessor. The sacred lance or spear with which Christ had been wounded on the cross was also given to Titurel. Klingsor established his palace near Monsalvat, and surrounded it with magic gardens, filled with all that can enchant the senses. Kundry fell into the power of the wizard, and by her fascination was able to ensnare Amfortas, in spite of the fact that he was hereditary guardian of the sacred treasure.

In a contest with Klingsor, the king was overpowered; the magician seized the spear, and with it gave the king the wound from which he had suffered for so many years. He could not be relieved until "the sinless fool," "der reine Thor," should come to the Grail castle,

of Parsifal

“enlightened by pity,” and touch the bleeding sore with the very weapon which had inflicted the wound. This message, in regard to the restoration of the afflicted one, had appeared in illuminated letters about the sacred cup, and since that moment the king and his companions had looked constantly for the appearance of the destined saviour.

All these facts are revealed to the listener in the conversation which ensues between Gurnemanz and Kundry, when the cortège of the king has moved onward to the lake. The wise old man comforts the saddened woman, and tells her that evil vanishes when replaced by good—“Das Böse bannt, wer's mit Gutem vergilt.”

He has barely finished his story of the long-expected guileless one, the sinless fool, when all are startled by the whizzing of an arrow, and the fall of one of the carefully guarded swans. A moment later Parsifal rushes upon the scene, proudly confessing that he shot the swan upon

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the wing. He listens in surprise, and then with deep contrition, to the eloquent reproach of Gurnemanz. Suddenly, as he realizes the shame of killing a beautiful, harmless creature, he breaks his bow, and declares that never again will he destroy innocent life!

Afterward he talks with Kundry, who tells him he is the son of Gahmuret, and informs him of his mother's death. The boy is angry and distressed, and inveighs against Kundry in youthful heat, until Gurnemanz again reproves him, and assures him that Kundry always speaks the truth. Parsifal then grows calm, and describes his life in the forest with his mother, and the brilliantly accoutred knights — “*glanzende Männer*” — whom he followed eagerly until he stumbled upon the precincts of beautiful Monsalvat.

Gurnemanz has watched the boy carefully, and suspects that he may be the guileless one for whom all are waiting, so he leads him up-

of Parsifal

ward to the Grail castle, and then begins the wonderful music of the bells, which continues all through the holy and uplifting service of the uncovering of the Grail. The great transformation scene, which reveals the Grail chamber, has been one of the marvels of the performance of Bayreuth, and nothing could be more imposing and inspiring than the feast of the Grail as it is portrayed in the melodious drama, with the accompaniment of its ethereal and angelic music.

There can be no death to those who see the Grail, so Titurel, the aged father of Amfortas, has lived on, supported by the glorious Presence of the uncovered cup, and the refreshing descent of the snowy dove, which brings blessing to all who are privileged to partake of the divine banquet. The uncovering of the Grail renders the suffering of Amfortas so poignant that he shrinks from the office which obliges him to lift the sacred vessel himself, while its crystal

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outline glows with radiant light as the dove descends. He begs Titurel to perform the service which brings joy to every heart except his own, but the aged monarch insists that it is his son's duty, and so the suffering king reluctantly puts aside his pain, and reveals the holy chalice. The bread and wine are shared as in the sacrament of communion, and all the guests at the heavenly table are blessed and sustained by the ministration.

Parsifal is asked to join the others, but he looks on wonderingly and says nothing, so Gurnemanz asks him, sharply: "Did you understand what you saw?" and then pushes him from the holy interior, with angry countenance, crying:

"Away, gander, and find yourself a goose!"

The inspiration of faith and hope is recalled at the conclusion of the act, however, by the thrilling cadence of a single voice singing, "The sinless fool through pity enlightened!"

of Parsifal

This is strengthened by the entire chorus, which bursts forth with “Selig im Glauben! Selig im Glauben!” “Blessed in Faith!” as the curtain falls.

The commencement of the second act, with its Vorspiel, is like a descent from heaven to hell, for it opens with the Klingsor music, and a view of the interior of the magician’s palace, revealing his own secret cell with the magic mirror, in which all that happens in the world of interest to the magician is sure to be reflected. Klingsor summons Kundry and commands her, in spite of her heart-broken pleading, to accomplish the ruin of Parsifal, and thus render it impossible for him to heal the suffering Amfortas.

The next scene introduces us to the marvellous garden surrounding Klingsor’s palace, where we see Parsifal in his play with the maidens, who are transformed flowers. He has never seen any woman except his mother, previous to

⇒ The Legends

his meeting with Kundry, and his innocence feels no temptation in the interlacing arms of the charming companions whose breath touches his cheek. He begs them to keep farther from him, and exclaims:

“ How sweet they smell! Are they flowers? ”

In the scene with the maidens the music is enchanting, with its interweaving melodies, combining the *motifs* of Parsifal, of Kundry, and the magic spell, with lovely and ethereal tunes and harmonies which seem to unite every suggestion of a fragrant garden wilderness. Blossomy pathways and purest love, maidenly fancy in which passion has no part, describe the charming sentiment of these numbers. They offer the strongest contrast to the passionate, tragic, almost painful passages which are heard immediately afterward, and accompany the stormy and dramatic scene of Parsifal’s interview with Kundry, whom he does not recognize at first in her guise of beautiful enchantress. The long

of Parsifal

story of his mother's life and suffering is in the beginning the most salient feature of the meeting. Kundry seems to bring before the very eyes of the boy, with the magic of her art, the figure of his mother and the realization of her loss, so that the anguished youth leaps from his place beside her with a bitter cry of:

“ Precious mother! How could I forget you! ”

Having roused the tenderness of his nature, she describes to him the love his father bore his mother, and concludes with the passionate embrace which is intended to illustrate the love of his parents for each other, and stir temptation in the soul of the “ sinless fool.” The result, however, is the awakening of that divine pity which is to save Parsifal first, and then enable him to heal Amfortas. The boy springs to his feet again, with a wild exclamation expressive of the feeling in his heart.

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“ Oh, miserable one! Oh, anguished sufferer!
I saw the wounds bleed!”

Kundry’s curse follows, but Parsifal scarcely hears its condemnation to “wander, wander!” He sees beside him the figure of the Saviour of men, revealed in a radiant vision, and his entire being is penetrated with the uplift of selfless love. So when Klingsor pauses upon the garden wall, and hurls at him the spear with which Christ was pierced, with which the magician in turn had wounded Amfortas, the “reine Thor” stands unterrified, seizes the spear, and with the sign of the cross destroys the magic of the wizard’s pleasure place, so that it crumbles into meaningless dust. Parsifal turns away, and the curtain falls, as the thrilling music mingles the *motifs* of the Grail, the lament of the maidens, the magic of Klingsor, and that heavenly yearning which lifts mankind from the storm of passion to great peace.

The third act opens after the *Vorspiel* has

of Parsifal

pictured the wandering of Parsifal for five long years. Then at last he approaches the Grail castle. He rides fully armed, though it is Good Friday, when the Church commands all true knights to lay aside their armour.

All the opening music of the third act portends the coming peace and the cessation of suffering. There is a suggestion of Easter gladness and spring-like happiness in the flowery passages which combine with the holy sweetness of the Good Friday spell, the Parsifal *motif*, and that of Kundry's redemption. The promise of the glorious end is already suggested in the rising picture of Kundry's repentance.

Gurnemanz has discovered Kundry weeping for her sins. Parsifal is immediately and joyfully recognized by the spear he bears, for it is that which Klingsor hurled at him from the garden wall. Gurnemanz has waited impatiently for his reappearance, knowing that he



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must return at the appointed time and heal the king.

Kundry serves him with gladness. She serves all faithfully, hoping to win thereby salvation for her soul. She bathes his feet, and receives baptism from his hand. Gurnemanz anoints him King of the Grail, and then conducts him to the marvellous chamber where the mysterious treasure is preserved, and where at last the suffering monarch shall be healed.

The Grail is uncovered, and its crystal globe illumined by a shaft of crimson light. The aged Titurel is at peace, for he knows at last that the sin of the Grail keeper is washed out. The white dove descends to bring the blessing of Heaven, Kundry gives up her life upon the altar steps, the entire scene is irradiated by glorious illumination, the chorus breaks into the exquisite pæan of salvation:

“Erlösung dem Erlöser! Erlösung dem Erlöser!” “Salvation to the Saviour!”

of Parsifal

The secret of the Grail is spoken in these words of Wagner's chorus, for they seem to unite the world in the golden circle of love, which includes for ever the unity of God and man.

No one has treated the Grail theme so elaborately as Wagner, and no one before his time could have accompanied the words of the poem with music so exquisite in its power to express that strange, unutterable something which it is beyond the compass of words to portray. The varying power of the different *motifs* naturally appeals in diverse fashion to the senses of listening auditors, but the exquisite thrilling cadence of the Grail melody, the soul-stirring crescendo in the positive cheerful note of the faith *motif*, the strength of Parsifal's song, can surely never be forgotten by those who are fortunate enough to have become familiar with them.

As we turn from Wagner's rich and encompassing Grail drama to the work of his prede-

⇒ The Legends

cessors, we are amazed not only at their number, but at the jewelled and glittering wealth of their production. Ever since the world began there have been singers, for men must sing as well as eat and work, as the economists sometimes forget. The singers, the poets, the prophets have been the light-bringers, and among all the songs that have lifted the burdens from the shoulders of mankind, none has been sung so constantly through the ages as the heavenly song of the Holy Grail.

Sometimes it is Galahad who seeks the chalice, and brings it from its hiding-place, that men may rejoice once more; sometimes, and most gloriously, it is Parsifal who enters the Grail castle and restores the treasure; but the singer is always gazing into the heavens as he touches his harp, and its golden strings thrill with that joyous pain, that sweet wisdom, which lingers ever in the heart of man, and reminds us that, if he is half-human, he is also half an angel.

of Parsifal &

The critics can never agree as to the origin of the Grail legends; even the strict meaning of Grail, or Graal, is uncertain. Some investigators are inclined to believe that it springs originally from a Latin word *Gradalis*, meaning prayer-book, and rose from the fact that the words of the poem were once written in such a volume, but this is not very probable, and we are more interested in the undoubted fact that the beginnings of the legends are lost in the darkness of early Christian days. The first singer has not left us his name, but we can be certain that he was a minstrel who carried his harp through wild pathways and trackless forests, to seek admission at last in some lonely castle, where his song ensured him a royal welcome. There he sat in the great banquet-hall, and touched his harp before an audience of mailed knights and jewelled ladies, while a younger aspirant for fame, who perhaps had borne his precious instrument across the country,

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craved the privilege of sitting nearest the inspired one, who first lifted his voice in the measure of this unwritten song, the wondrous mystery of the Holy Grail!

We so naturally associate the names of Parsifal and Galahad with the history of the Grail that we are surprised to discover how simply the tale was told in the early days. It is not until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that we find it connected with Arthur's court, and the achievements of his knights. None of our existing manuscripts of Grail poems date earlier than the fourteenth century, but it is easy to detect, in the quaint and primitive form of some of them, the unskilled hand of an early and unlettered singer. Among these the sweet old poem of Joseph of Arimathea is an excellent illustration of the legend in its simpler form.

It tells us of how Joseph, who was the friend of Jesus, had been present during that wonderful hour when he sat at table for the last time

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with his disciples, and gave them his farewell. Joseph had left the chamber where the meal was served, but, as his memory lingered over the wise words of his loved Master, he felt that he must have a memorial of that hour so rich in meaning, and he returned to the supper-room, to find the table still standing with the remains of the feast upon it. He took joyfully the silver cup from which all had drunk, and which Jesus had shared with his disciples, and hid it in the folds of his mantle.

As he stood later in the darkness of Calvary, Joseph still held the cup in his arms, and when the Roman soldier pierced the side of the Master, Joseph lifted the cup, and caught in it the sacred blood shed so willingly by the great Lover of mankind. After it had served so sacred a purpose, the cup could never fall into any ordinary use. Joseph preserved it with its holy contents, and it became his guard-

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ian and inspiration, his spiritual comforter, the Holy Grail.

Joseph lost his possessions, and was thrown into prison, was left to starve in a high tower, but the cup was with him, and no harm could come to him! Something like forty years he lingered behind stone walls, but when he was liberated, he declared it seemed to him only three days and three nights, because the Grail was with him! He had been condemned to starvation, but the angels spread for him the table of the Grail, and he was fed daily with what he liked best to eat and to drink! His confinement was to be solitary, but glorious winged visitors floated through the stone walls of his prison, bringing him strong words of heavenly consolation, and the Master whom he had seen hanging upon the cross, sat with him long hours, and taught him wisdom which he could not have learned from any other source! Was it any wonder that his confine-

of Parsifal

ment seemed to him only three nights and three days in duration, after he was set free?

When that glad hour came, the Master said to him, "Son, go thou forth and carry my message to many lands!"

Then Joseph was sorrowful, and replied:

"Master, I have always been slow of speech, and I cannot be a preacher."

"Son," said the Shining One, with gentle encouragement, "trouble not as to thy words, but open thy lips and speech shall be given thee!"

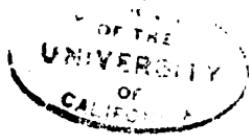
So Joseph left his prison walls, went to the shores of the sea, where a white boat carried him to Britain. Then joy came to that land, the great Abbey of Glastonbury was built to hold the Grail, the hawthorn bloomed at Christmas-time because the Grail had come, and the nightingale sang in its branches!

As time passed, each singer added his note to the Grail message, so that the great groups

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of Grail poems, gathering about the names of Parsifal and Galahad, form a rich symposium, preserving the feeling of the ages in regard to the mystic union of the soul and God. For that is the symbolism of the Grail. Whether the poet figures it as a cup which has held the blood of Christ, or as a marvellous green stone, as does Wolfram von Eschenbach, he sees in the outward semblance that rich and never forgotten moment of ecstasy which Emerson so eloquently pictures in his essay of the Over Soul, when the human spirit finds its union with the Divine One beyond and above us all.

So he who has the Grail has all. He can never suffer hunger or thirst, he can never be imprisoned, never experience the anguish of one who knows not love, for he has all wisdom, all love, all the possibilities of human achievement in the sacred and inspiring presence of the wondrous treasure which lifts the human



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soul out of its narrow confines, and opens to it the infinite.

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries bring us the long and more pretentious Grail epics which connect the heroic achievements of *Parsifal* and *Galahad* with the simple devotional legend of an earlier time. These are the great centuries, also, of the Crusades and of the first whisperings of heresy in the Church, so it is not strange that the Grail singers broadened their theme, and deepened their note. The time was one which really marks the modern awakening of the human soul, and it was but natural that the minstrel who first wandered far from the scenes of his birth should find new and richer meanings in the song which he had heard sung by an earlier bard.

The critics are agreed to-day that the *Galahad* cycle of poems, with which American and English readers are most familiar, is of later date, and that the first Grail hero, whose deeds

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the poets delighted to celebrate, was the gracious and inspiring figure of Parsifal. The long epics of the Great Holy Grail, Launcelot, and the Quest are supposed to have been written in Latin, by Walter Map, in the twelfth, or the beginning of the thirteenth century. They were early translated into the Northern French of the Trouvères, and their Latin originals have long since disappeared. They formed the foundation of Sir Thomas Malory's noble "Morte d'Arthur," and from that source have become infiltrated through all English literature.

The Parsifal poems are many, and of varying interest, the most important, aside from the great "Parzival,"¹ by Wolfram von Es-

¹ The spelling of the same proper names is sometimes very different, in old French and German and in modern times. For instance, Wagner's hero, Parsifal, is called Parzival in the old High German of Wolfram von Eschenbach. The same name has the forms of Perchevaus in the old Northern French of Chrestien de Troyes, it is Peredur in Welsh, Percival or

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chenbach, being "Li Contes del Graal," by Chrestien de Troyes, the Portuguese prose romance, by Perceval le Gallois, the German poem, "Die Krone," by Heinrich von dem Turlin, and the Celtic story of Peredur.

The *Parsifal* ideals were gathered and centred in the momentous epic of "Parzival," written by Wolfram von Eschenbach in the beginning of the thirteenth century, which so far has remained the greatest Grail poem of the world. Its spirit has penetrated German literature, and has reappeared most eloquently in Wagner's lovely music-drama of *Parsifal*, demonstrating thus significantly the perennial freshness of the Grail theme.

A comparatively superficial analysis will usually convince the Grail student that the Galahad poems must have been suggested by

Percivale in English and French, Perceval in Spanish or Portuguese. The Kundry of Wagner is Kondrie la Sorcière in Wolfram's epic, Wagner's Klingsor is Klinschor in the older poem.

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those of *Parsifal*, though they may have been written earlier than Wolfram's monumental epic. If one were seeking to define the atmosphere of the two cycles, that of *Galahad* would necessarily be described as theological, and that of *Parsifal* as intensely mystical. As mysticism disappears instantly at the approach of theology, this would settle the question from the standpoint of a student of ethics, but there are innumerable charming details in the two cycles, which invariably rise in the *Galahad* stories as the shadows of those more clearly designated in the spacious outlines of the *Parsifal* events.

The *Parsifal* epos is dominated by a larger and more noble ideal than that which reigns in its attendant cycle. It is from Wolfram that we inherit that brave painting of the Grail castle in Southern Spain, which may have been originally the poetic conception of a crusading minstrel. The gray château stands alone, guarded by its band of chosen knights, but

of Parzifal &

though they are devoted to its service for the time being,¹⁴ they are not monks, they have not given up the world. They serve the Grail, and thereby gain wisdom and prowess impossible of attainment in any other service. But when a great deed is to be accomplished beyond the powers of ordinary men, when a maiden is to be saved, a kingdom preserved, the Grail to be won, then the cup or the jewel is unveiled, the name of the chosen one is written in fire about the holy surface, and the selected knight goes forth to carry the fragrance of the Grail to mankind in the noble deed he performs for his kin or his race.

Within the castle the treasure is watched and guarded by maidens who are chastely devoted to the Grail while they remain in the holy Presence, but when a wife is needed in the world, whose mission is beyond the powers of an ordinary woman, when a mother must bear a son who is destined to be a Grail-bearer or seeker,

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then once more the chosen one goes forth, that the glory of the Grail may be visible again in the radiance of her beautiful life.

The seeker of the Grail may ride far and wide in search of the castle, he may stand beside it, he may touch its massive walls with the sleeve of his doublet, but he will not see it unless it is his hour to do so, unless Heaven draws the veil from his eyes that he may perceive the truth!

Throughout the great poem of Wolfram the note is one of attainment through service, and of the joy to be found in the life of really loving activity. There is no word of stern duty and ascetic deprivation. It is the voice of the primitive Church we seem to hear, another version of Saint Francis's beautiful "Canticle of the Sun."

In the Galahad poems a much stricter theology is evident. The careful glorification of the Church, and dedication of all service to its

of Parsifal

preservation is insisted upon. Galahad is born a consecrated priest, so to speak, dedicated to the achievement of the Grail, for the glory of "Holy Church." He needs no purification or preparation for his great deed, since his birth fitted him for its consummation. He is reared in a nunnery, as his mother died at his birth; his father, Launcelot, did not know of his existence, and he was therefore consigned to the care of the holy women. The hero is ever the celibate priest, and when at last he achieves the Grail in the city of Sarras, his prayer is that he may die at once, since in his visions he has learned that the angels feel such joy as mortals can never know until they mingle with the angelic host!

It is significant that wherever the Grail is described in the Galahad poems it is presented to the happy devotee with the ceremony of the holy communion of the Catholic Church. It is always accompanied by the consecrated wafer,

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and Joseph of Arimathea descends from heaven in the robes of a bishop to preside at the altar upon which the Grail is displayed to the eyes of its worshippers.

One wearies sometimes of the flawless perfection of Galahad, who is never even tempted to sin, and has therefore nothing to overcome. But the poet who writes the story is ever more or less of an artist, so the effort toward attainment, which is always so necessary in faulty human nature, is represented by the struggle and frequent failure of knightly Launcelot, and by brave Bors and noble Percival, who always accompany Galahad in his quest.

There is refreshment in the comparative failures of Bors, and the reader never forgets the moment in the narrative when he lies wounded at the bottom of a deep well. He has resisted temptation, he has fought nobly for his ideal, but he is nevertheless alone and deserted, seeing but a single star far above

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him in the blue heaven. Suddenly a dove flies down to him, bearing a censer in its bill; a strange and wonderful fragrance fills his nostrils, he falls asleep with the voices of angels in his ears, and wakens to safety and healing. The Grail has found him in his despair, and has saved him!

Launcelot cannot achieve the Grail because of his guilty love for Guinevere, but he struggles with his sin, and so again and again is brought almost into the Holy Presence. He hears the chanting of the angels, he detects that wondrous fragrance which invariably accompanies the appearance of the Grail. Upon one occasion he falls prone across the threshold of the chamber where the mystery is concealed, and though his body cannot enter, all the glory of the experience is revealed to his exalted spirit, so that he complains when his friends awake him from his swoon. We rejoice with

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him at last when his soul is purified from all stain, and he is at peace.

Even the colouring of the Grail picture in its Galahad setting is essentially churchly. The Grail itself, and the vestments of Galahad are always scarlet and white, theologically the colours of the Passion and purification of sin, and of those who are washed white as snow from its stain.

In the Parsifal cycle the Grail colour is a soft luminous green, which is not only that of the Grail stone itself, but of the velvet robe of Répanse de Schoie, who bears it in the procession, when it is uncovered before the sick king. The selection of this colour was undoubtedly not an accident, whether it was a tradition to Wolfram von Eschenbach, or original with him. He has shown himself so steeped in mystical lore, that he would naturally be versed in the mystic significance of colours. From this point of view, green represents har-

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mony, life, such renaissance as would only be possible to the soul through the ministry of the Grail. It is rather significant in this connection that with Rossetti, and among our modern impressionist artists, green is regarded as the colour best fitted for the expression of musical ideas.

The suggestion that the theological bias of the Galahad poems would indicate a later authorship than that of Wolfram's "Parzival" is strengthened by the fact that all were written in the moment of the first great struggle of the Church with heresy. The scourging of the Albigensians occurred in the first ten years of the thirteenth century, and the heresy centred in the luxurious and cultured court of Raymond of Toulouse. Walter Map, to whom the great Galahad poems are attributed, was a broad-minded churchman, who had taken merely the lower orders. He was called to the infected



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provinces to give his advice as to the punishment of the heretics.

At the gay court of Toulouse he came in contact with the finest culture of the day, and must have heard that famous minstrel, Kyot, of whom Wolfram speaks in his great epic. The German singer disclaims all credit for invention in his narrative. He asserts that he sings his song as he remembers to have heard Kyot sing it at the court of Toulouse.

We know nothing of Kyot beyond his mention by Wolfram, and critics usually decide, therefore, that the knightly poet has seen fit to invent his predecessor's performance to excuse his own. But nothing of the sort is indicated by Wolfram's words. He says that his contemporary, Chrestien de Troyes, has also borrowed from Kyot, but has not acknowledged it, and has not preserved the spiritual message of his master. The poet adds that he himself is more anxious to express this than anything

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else, in which he is undoubtedly sincere. His poem is penetrated by profound religious and mystical feeling, which, however, would hardly have been considered orthodox in its own day.

On the contrary it bristles with the salient points of the Albigensian heresy, which did not antagonize the Church, but demanded a return to the primitive simplicity and brotherhood of the early times, and taught a mystic asceticism and purity, in strong contrast with the existing customs of the clergy. A little later the real influence of the heresy purified the Church through the beautiful teachings of Saint Francis. When one remembers that the persecution of the Church included the literature of the sect as well as its members, it would not appear singular if the manuscripts of Kyot's work were all burned. One understands then why Chrestien de Troyes failed to transmit the spiritual message of his master, and why Wolfram blames him for this significant omission.

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In the same way it is evident that if the good churchman, Walter Map, had been charmed with the Grail song of Parzival, penetrated as it was by the fascinating heresy which the Church must extinguish, his first impulse would be to reënforce the lovely story with an orthodoxy which would render it safe for all hearers.

Among the many points which may be mentioned as indicating the relationship of the two cycles, and the later authorship of the Galahad poems, are especially the incidents of the Grail castle, the wounded king, and Percival's connection with Galahad's adventures.

In the Galahad cycle the castle is always mentioned as if its location and history were well known, and need not be described. King Pelles is called King of the Grail, and his daughter, who is a Grail maiden, must be the mother of Galahad, as if this fact consecrated her to such a service, but no details are given as to these interesting mysteries.

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In the Parzival epic the healing of Amfortas ✓ is the central event of the hero's mission. The plot thickens about the spiritual development to which Parzival must attain before he can ask the question, or heal the king, and the interest of the story hinges upon his two visits to the Grail castle.

Galahad also heals a sick king. In some of the versions even the odd and unexplainable old play upon words in the use of *Pescheur*, which means both sinner and fisher, is preserved. But Galahad heals the king as a mere incident of his journey to Sarras. There is no significance in the action, and it would hardly find a place in the new drama, if the author's mind had not retained a similar incident more eloquently described. If it were dropped from the recital of Galahad's deeds, it would never be missed.

One wonders also why Galahad cannot achieve the Grail alone, but is always accompanied by

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Percival. Bors seems to be added to complete the symbolism of a trinity, but Percival,— he is the same as Parsifal, Parzival, the Perchevaus of Chrestien de Troyes — he is the hero of the older cycle! Surely the singer of Galahad's knightly prowess must first have heard the tale of Parzival's achievement, and could not conscientiously drop him from intimate connection with the Grail mysteries!

One turns with eagerness from all these questionings to the charming old epic of Wolfram von Eschenbach, which was the inspiration of Wagner's great music-drama of Parsifal, and which is doubly of interest to us because it is a survival of that wonderful renaissance of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which has spoken to us in the "Divine Comedy" of Dante, and in the spiritual awakening which Saint Francis brought the world. In this way the epic of Wolfram is distinct from the group

of *Parzifal* &

of great poems dedicated to the deeds of chivalry, like the Song of Roland, or the Siegfried epics. From beginning to end it is dominated by a spiritual conception of the soul in its relations to life which colours all its chivalric imagery, and frees it to a marked degree from the atmosphere of mediævalism. It is evident that the author had pondered deeply many questions relating to ideal living, and had reached some conclusions to which the majority of mankind has not yet attained, though the number of the enlightened is rapidly increasing in our own day.

It was this element in the old poem which rendered it so fascinating to Richard Wagner, for it would be a sad mistake to suppose that the most gifted musical composer of the nineteenth century was absorbed merely in the dramatic possibilities of the themes which occupied him. His questionings upon human life always centred in certain social changes, which would

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enable the individual to conquer his destiny without that tremendous conflict which he himself had encountered, and which bade fair to leave him broken and defeated upon the field of battle.

For years he had felt dimly that the soul must win its way and attain serenity through overcoming. So he busied himself with plans and plots, representing the spiritual victory of Christ and Buddha, in which the victory was ever emphasized, and these he never carried to completion. He could not write the victor drama, or hear the victor music, until he had won at least a certain mastery over his own destiny. When that moment came, he turned again to the epic of Parzival with a fresh and illuminating comprehension of the old minstrel's conception of victory.

“To conquer through love! That is the way!” cries Wolfram, and long before Schopenhauer lived to paint the exterior world as

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merely Will and Idea, the knightly singer had taught his hearers that to conquer for others is the only victory which brings real happiness to the inhabitants of this whirling planet of earth!

Meanwhile, it would be exceedingly unjust to imagine for a moment that Wolfram von Eschenbach was morbid and pessimistic. He was, on the contrary, sane, and heartily in sympathy with all the life of his day, but he believed in immortality, and looked upon life from the point of view of eternal existence, not that of the limited span visible to our mortal eyes. He was also a thinker who remained an earnest and spiritual Christian, but had freed himself quite positively from the jurisdiction of the Church — and we must remember that in Wolfram's day there was but one Church.

It is evident that to him, winning the Grail meant bringing God into life, and the victory

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of Parzival could only be attained through a process of evolution intensely human. In other words, the problem of Wolfram's epic is identical with that of Goethe's "Faust," but the older poet has approached his undertaking with a simple faith and a belief in love as the most powerful solvent of earthly difficulties, which renders his pages for ever interesting, and brings them always within the comprehension of the mind that cannot attain the heights of philosophy.

Wolfram was at heart a sincere democrat, and, though he gave his hero a royal father, he did not allow him to be reared at court. Gahmuhret was married first to a Saracen princess named Belakane, and later was united to Herzeleide, the mother of Parzival, who had served in the Grail castle, and was called forth to become the mother of the one whose destiny it was to heal Amfortas, and restore the sweet and perfect atmosphere of the Grail environment.

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When the child was born, his father had been slain in battle, and the wise mother, who knew the destiny of her son, felt that a simple woodland life would prepare him better for his future career than the etiquette of a courtly circle. There was another motive stirring in her heart also. She had lost all she loved best in this world, and she would have preferred to keep her child in her own loving arms, rather than resign him to the most glorious career, which would separate him from her. So she placed him where only the will of God could call him to fame and great deeds.

She left the court, and sought a forest retreat, with only a few devoted followers. She forbade her people to mention to the boy his father's name or his own royal lineage. He was never to hear the words knighthood, chivalry, Arthur's court, and thus nothing less positive than the law of destiny could bring him the career of glory and peril which his birth seemed to

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necessitate, from which the tender heart of even this wise mother must shrink.

So the child grew up in the forest, learning lessons from the birds, making friends of all the wild things about him, and listening to the wise words of his mother. One of the most beautiful incidents of the forest life, which Wagner has transformed very dramatically into Parsifal's adventure with the swans, is that of shooting the bird. The little boy had made himself a bow and arrows, and had become quite expert in their use. He loved the singing of the birds, and knew nothing of death. One day he took aim at a pretty songster, and to his horror it fell helpless at his feet, and could no longer sing. He lifted it, examined it with anguish in his childish heart, but alas! he could not restore it to music and movement. The little creature lay limp and silent in his hand, and he learned the pathos and mystery of death.

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After that he spent many hours under the shadowy branches of the trees, listening to the chorus of the birds, until his little heart swelled almost to bursting with that deep poet's pain which always means the tragedy of human life to him who feels it, because it touches the inexpressible. So he wept with this strange suffering,—as children often do, adds the old poet wisely,—and ran to his mother for comfort. She forgot her divine wisdom in the pity of motherhood, and thought only of consoling her child, so she said:

“I will snare the birds and kill them if they make you weep.”

She gave orders for a crusade against the birds by her woodland helpers, and many were slain. But some escaped and continued to sing in the tree-tops. The little boy suffered over the slaughter of his friends, and said to his mother:

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“Why do you kill the pretty birds when they have done no harm?”

Then Herzeleide was recalled to her nobler self, and exclaimed:

“Alas, how have I forgotten the commands of God, the great and supreme God!”

The boy looked at her earnestly. “Mother,” he asked, “what is that? What is God?”

His words showed the mother that he was ready to understand some of the mysteries of life, and that she could reveal to him a little of the wisdom she had learned in the Grail castle during her long service there. So she began to teach him of God.

“My son,” she said, “God is everything that is bright and beautiful. Seek him in the sunshine, and in all that is radiant, lovely, and full of light. But avoid the darkness, for that is evil. That is like hatred and vice, but God is like love.”

The child pondered deeply over this wonder-

of Parsifal

ful message, and, with the eager fancy of childhood, dreamed constantly of its realization. One day, as he was in the forest, he saw coming toward him, down the broad aisles of woodland pathways, a group of knights, brilliant in all the panoply of golden armour and waving plume. The boy stood transfixed before them, so that they were obliged to pause in their onward passage, as they did not wish to ride him down, though they were irritated at his interruption of their quest.

“ Oh, help me, God; you are so rich in help!” cried the boy.

The leader of the group, the most brilliantly accoutred among them, answered the boy, but he would not listen.

“ Tell me who you are!” he insisted, kneeling. “ You are God; I know you are God!”

“ I am not God,” responded the knight, reverently, “ but I try to obey his commands. I am a knight, and, if you would use your eyes,”

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he added, “you would see that there are four of us!”

“Knights! Knights!” cried the boy, eagerly. “What does that mean?”

Then the gentleman explained to the handsome youth before him, who seemed to be so simple, the glories of knighthood, chivalry, and Arthur’s court. The boy wondered at his armour, with its innumerable rings, and, drawing out his sword from its scabbard, the cavalier displayed its flashing surface, and illustrated its use.

Then, in conclusion, he frankly admired the beauty of the boy, and said:

“Why do you not go to Arthur’s court? You could win knighthood and honour there. I wish I had your fine figure and your handsome face!”

The youth had never heard such words as this, and his eyes flashed. His father and all his uncles had fallen in the chivalrous combats



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of the noble king, and the words roused echoes in his brain that could not be stilled. He turned hastily and sought his mother.

“ Give me arms and a horse! ” he cried. “ I also will ride to Arthur’s court and win knighthood! ”

Then the poor mother knew — as other mothers have known — that her hour had come, that God’s plan for her child must be fulfilled in spite of her heart-break. Ah, if she could but have rejoiced in the plan, her heart need not have broken!

Just here it may be proper to say a word of the curious and charming symbolism which pervades Wolfram’s poem, and adds constantly to its suggestion. The events which form the web and woof of the story are natural and life-like to an unusual degree, but frequently they serve the double purpose of carrying on the plot, and increasing its spiritual meaning.

The name of Parzival’s mother — Herzeleide

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— means Sorrow of the Heart, and, as the hero is a type who stands for mankind in its progress, we are reminded that this same mother, Sorrow of the Heart, has borne the saviours, prophets, and poets of the world from time im-memorial. We are wrong in shrinking from Sorrow, for she frequently brings us our most divine moments.

During all his life in the forest, Parzival does not know his name. He is, moreover, frequently spoken of as a “fool,” and, if the poet were to explain his meaning in this, he would doubtless tell us that such a fool as Parzival is one who is enlightened by the spirit and not the intellect, who has been deprived of the ordinary mental culture, which we term education. But such a fool is frequently the wisest of men, and obeys the monition of the inner voice far more perfectly than those who have been granted broader intellectual advantages. Parzival is never painted as lacking in mental strength,

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but as having been left without worldly advantages through which he might have acquired conventional learning.

From the moment when he met the knights in the forest, every incident in the boy's life became significant and suggestive. His mother prepared his outfit so that there might be still another necessity that the will of God should manifest itself in the shaping of his future. She knew well that the world is prone to judge its saviour and prophet by his dress and bearing rather than his spiritual gifts, and she determined to render Parzival's recognition as difficult as possible. So she fashioned him a doublet from a meal-sack, in which she cut three holes, one for his head and two for his arms. His leggings were formed from the skin of a freshly killed calf, and he bestrode a steed, furnished by his mother's stables, the like of which was never known till Don Quixote later rode to conquest on the famous Rosinante. The boy's only

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weapon was a javelin, which he had learned to hurl with unfailing aim in his woodland practice. He was so eager to set forth that he could hardly wait for his mother's final instructions, and he forgot to kiss her good-bye.

She warned him, however, that he must always treat with respect those whom he saw with white hair, and she told him also that, if he saw a pretty woman, he must kiss her and take away her rings and jewels. This last enigmatic mandate she no doubt felt would preserve her son from the temptations of wily women, and it surely was the charm of a seeress for the unschooled boy.

His mother died as he left her, but he was so eager for the new life that he did not look back, and was not aware that she had fallen. His first encounter was with Jeschute, a young and beautiful woman, his meeting with whom no doubt gave Wagner a hint for his wonderful Kundry scene in the second act of the drama.

of Parzival

Parzival followed his mother's instructions to the letter, however, and came away scatheless. Then he met his cousin, Sigune, and it may be said here that Sigune represents in the poem the awakened conscience or intelligence within ourselves, which takes note of our mistakes and illuminates our progress.

She met the boy after the excitement of his first adventure, and immediately asked his name.

“I don't know my name,” he replied. “In the forest they always called me darling and dear boy. Have I another name?”

“You have the most beautiful name in the world!” replied Sigune. “And you must never forget it. Your name is Parzival,—*perce vallée*,—that means to pierce the valley, and that means that love pierces to truth as surely as it ploughs furrows in your mother's cheek!”

Then she told him of his lineage, of his father's honour and his mother's station. She explained that she was his cousin, and told him

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enough of her sorrows to elicit his warm sympathy. After this he went on to meet Ither the Red Knight, and bear his challenge to Arthur's court.

It is interesting to recall the manner in which Galahad entered the court of the chivalric king, at the time of his introduction to the Round Table, in comparison with the rude and almost shocking entrance of Parzival.

Galahad crossed the threshold of the great banquet-hall guided by Merlin, who is sometimes represented as invisible; the old enchanter is always the guardian of the young knight.

There was one seat at the round table called the "siege perilous," and on the preceding day it had been observed that a new writing was visible about its margin, which indicated that the time had arrived when the greatest knight of the world should occupy this chair. Launcelot threw a silken cover over it, and all waited for the coming event. It was believed that any one

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bold enough to sit in this sacred place would pay the penalty of death for his temerity.

When Galahad entered the hall, he was robed in scarlet velvet and princely ermine. He walked to the fatal chair, removed the cover, and seated himself, while all wondered with suspended breath to see what would happen. But Galahad sat in safety because he was born for this gilded throne-like support, and the recognition of the moment, so the assembled knights gazed at him with astonishment and reverence.

Parzival, on the contrary, rode into the hall upon his sorry steed, and flung the Red Knight's gauntlet at Arthur's feet. The youth was certainly noble of face and figure, but so strangely costumed that the company of knights and ladies broke into half-suppressed laughter at his appearance. He delivered the challenge he had brought, and then kneeling before the king, offered his prayer for the honour of knighthood.

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Arthur was touched by the beauty of the youth, and his princely manner, and, though he knew nothing of him, he would have granted his request. But there was an ominous tittering among the courtiers, and Kay, the seneschal, was evidently displeased. So the king hesitated, and at last consented to the wishes of the strange youth if he would wait until "tomorrow."

The fiery boy sprang to his feet, feeling the insult of the insolent laughter about him. Declaring he would take horse and armour from the bold warrior whose challenge he had brought, he rode haughtily away. The crowd pressed to the windows to watch his departure, bidding Iwanet, the page, hasten after him and bring news of his defeat. They did not restrain their scorn because Kunneware laughed, though it had been prophesied that she should never smile till her eyes rested on him who should become the greatest knight of the world, and her

of Parzival &

brother Antanor spoke, though the same prophecy pronounced him dumb until the moment when his sister could smile.

Parzival rode away absorbed in the vision of a conquest which should render him worthy of the honour he craved, and, strange to say, Ither the Red Knight fell before the spear-thrust of an unknown and unarmed boy. And it was not Parzival's destiny that overcame him, but the eager courage of insulted and irritated youth. The feeling of the Grail winner was not that of a saint when he overcame Ither, and we love him better because we are made to realize that he must purify the fierce spirit within himself before he could bear the sorrows of the world, or gain its victories.

Iwanet followed the footsteps of the hero, with the intention of witnessing his discomfiture, but he reached the scene of conflict just in time to save the rich armour of Ither from destruction. The inexperienced boy who had

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conquered the bold knight had never unfastened greaves or cuirass, and he was recklessly tearing them from the body of his fallen adversary when Iwanet reached him. The page was duly shocked at his ignorance, but willing to lend his skill, so presently he prepared to enclose the lithe limbs of the youth before him in knightly gear. He was naturally disgusted with Parzival's primitive attire, however, and, as he endeavoured to fit the greaves over the coarse calfskin leggings the conqueror wore, he muttered disdainfully:

“It is impossible to adjust armour upon such garments! The gentlemen I have been accustomed to arming wear silken hose beneath their greaves.”

Whereupon the rustic Parzival gave courtly bred Iwanet a lesson in true courtesy which he probably did not soon forget.

“Those leggings,” he responded, sternly,

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“were my mother’s gift, and I shall wear them till they drop off.”

It would be most interesting to follow Parzival through all the adventures which roused within him at last that spirit of love which alone can save the soul of man. He made mistakes, but he always profited by them, and he learned love through loving.

He spent many days with old Gurnemanz, familiarizing himself with the courtly etiquette of which he had known nothing in his forest life. Gurnemanz admired the youth, and would have liked to marry him to his daughter, but Parzival knew that she was not the one he loved, and so said farewell to the good old man. He learned many excellent truths from Gurnemanz, but he unfortunately retained one lesson which he should have forgotten. Gurnemanz said to him:

“Parzival, remember that you are but a fool, an uncultured boy, unaccustomed to the ways

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of the world and of polite society. So be careful at least not to betray your ignorance. Don't ask foolish questions."

For the exigencies of the drama, Wagner has combined the personality of Gurnemanz, the old courtier, with that of Trevrezent, the wise and saintly hermit, whom Parzival met later on in his career, and who taught him a divine wisdom quite beyond the compass of good old Gurnemanz, for Trevrezent was as learned in heavenly customs as Gurnemanz in those of earthly courts. So Parzival acquired his courtesy, as we all must do, from those familiar with widely different royalties.

The young knight rode from Gurnemanz' castle at last, because it was time for him to meet his destined love, Kondwiramur, whom he must win by overcoming the enemies who assailed her. We cannot linger over this tale of knightly prowess, but we like to remember that Parzival experienced all the sweetness of manly love and

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was tested in constancy before he could be so purified as to learn the meaning of heavenly love. The legend of his truth and fealty to his wife has penetrated all literatures, and we find everywhere the pretty story of how the knight fell into profound contemplation, from which his comrades could not rouse him, at sight of the drop of blood in the snow, which reminded him instantly of the red and white in the face of his beloved. The legend varies in details, but it is originally the story of Parzival's love. Her fair image never left his knightly heart.

He rode from her, however, because great deeds must be accomplished, and the Grail castle loomed before him with its question to be asked and answered. He had ridden far, and was anxious as to a shelter for the night. He came to the shores of a wide sea, and saw some men in a boat. One of them wore a cap made of peacock's feathers, and was as richly dressed as a king would be.

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Parzival called aloud, and was carefully directed to a castle not far distant, which, however, he had not seen, and his informant warned him that if he were not careful he might miss his way, for many false paths would lead him from the castle. He added that if he reached it in safety, he himself would be his host.

The story of Amfortas, as Wolfram tells it, is not so dramatically conceived as it appears in the music-drama, yet the fundamental idea is the same in both, and it is always interesting to discover how curiously, in almost all cases, the later poet has found the germ of even his dramatic placing in the primitive poem. Thus the wound of Amfortas is a spear-thrust which was given him by a heathen knight in the service of Orgeluse, the same fair lady who some years afterward bewitched Gawain so successfully. Orgeluse had ensnared Amfortas, though he was Grail king, and vowed to purity and holiness. She was also under the spell of Klinschor, and

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played much the same double game as that which is given to Kundry in the drama.

The wound of Amfortas was inflicted by a poisoned spear, and would not heal. It, of course, symbolizes the sin of passion, as is more powerfully expressed in Wagner's drama. The suffering of the conscience-stricken monarch, as well as that of the entire Grail circle on his account, is most tenderly recited in the old poem. Every means is sought for his relief in vain, and at last the luminous letters appear about the sacred stone, which reveal the strange fact that, when the appointed time arrives, a knight will enter the castle who will ask what makes the king suffer, and immediately he will be healed. But no one must suggest to the stranger that the question should be asked.

It was not strange, after such tragic experiences and long years of waiting, that Parzival, like many other strangers, should have been courteously received at the Grail castle. Nor

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was it strange that all eyes gazed earnestly upon him, and Répanse de Schoie, the Grail bearer, sent him her own velvet mantle to show him honour. It seemed as if this noble and earnest-eyed traveller might really be the one destined to ask the question, and bring peace and healing to the suffering king.

Wagner is largely indebted to Wolfram von Eschenbach for the dramatic and picturesque scene of the Grail chamber, where the banquet is served, for no portion of the great epic is more charming and suggestive than this. The details are so numerous that the scene seems to live before our eyes, while its atmosphere is so mystically poetic that its meaning can hardly escape even the careless reader.

The procession of maidens comes in twos and fours, in sixes and eights, and seven, winding, separating, and uniting in a fashion which displays the old poet's perfect familiarity with the cabalistic symbolism of numbers; so that their

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graceful convolutions preach a sermon on the realization and interpenetration of the divine and human. They bear lights and perfumed torches; they bring silver plates and cups for the banquet, which always accompanies the presentation of the Grail. Four knights eat and drink from the same cup and plate, but each partakes of the food and wine which his wish demands, for the power of the Grail in this, as in all cases, satisfies every need of the earnest seeker.

The lights, the perfumes, the rich dresses, and fair, sweet faces complete a most charming picture, and the joy of the moment is in all countenances. Yet the guests are silent. No one laughs aloud, no one voices that strange rapture which the lovely presence of the Grail rouses in the human soul.

Parzival looks about in wonder at the magnificent scene. He observes that the king alone is sorrowful, that he seems to be suffering



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deeply. What can it all mean? He is about to ask, when suddenly he remembers the warning of Gurnemanz: "Don't betray your ignorance by asking foolish questions."

Ah, he has bethought himself in time! He is but slightly acquainted with courts, with cultured society. How does he know but such a ceremonial as this may be of comparatively common occurrence among people of high position? And what would they think of his ignorance if they perceived his unsophisticated simplicity? Certainly the epic moment is a vivid one.

So he gazed at the wonderful picture spread before him; he absorbed the wondrous odours of the Grail; he felt the strange and inexpressible delight of its presence, and behaved, he was assured, like a polished gentleman. He was presented with a wonderful sword, such as he had never seen, and, as he noticed the countenance of Amfortas contract with pain, the

of Parsifal &

question again trembled on his lips — What ails you?

But he repressed it once more, said good night to his courteous host, and was conducted to his chamber. There everything was prepared for him with the utmost luxury, and he sank into oblivion upon his couch, quite unaware of the rich opportunity which had escaped him.

When he rose in the morning, however, all was changed. His sleep had been troubled and tormented by terrible dreams, so that in spite of his luxurious couch and stately attendance, he was rejoiced to see the morning light. No one answered his call, however, and at last, as he perceived his armour and swords lying upon the carpet near by, he rose, attired himself, and prepared for departure.

He found no one in all the great castle, which answered with lonely and empty echo the clash of his spurred heels against the stone floor. His horse was ready saddled in the stable; he

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mounted and rode across the drawbridge. As he passed out, he glanced up to see an impish face in the window of the tower, and a voice called to him, reproachfully: "You goose! Why did you not ask the question?" Ah, what sombre shadows enveloped Parzival as the words fell upon his ear!

Those who have seen Wagner's great music-drama will remember how dramatically the healing of Amfortas is conceived. Parsifal touches him with the bleeding spear which had once pierced the side of the Saviour, and which Klingsor had hurled at Amfortas himself, as Wagner tells the story, when the sinning king wandered into his forbidden garden of delight. In comparison with this, the simple healing by the asking of a mere question seems far less effective.

Yet the dramatic idea of the presence of the bleeding spear was not neglected by the old poet. In the beginning of the great Grail scene

of *Parzival*

in the banquet-hall, when the king is seated, but before the maidens have entered with the joy and fragrance which herald the Grail, a boy suddenly runs through the chamber with terrible cries, bearing in his hands a bleeding spear. The thrill of horror which rises at his irruption renders the succeeding ecstasy even doubly appreciable, and reminds one strangely of the mystical and tragic background in the pervading glory.

Wagner was always alive to dramatic necessities, and he wisely made use of the suggestion of the spear to add to the stage effect of the king's healing. But it is not well to lose sight of the beautiful spiritual thought in the older poet's mind in connection with the question, and this is suggested in *Parzival*'s conversation with Sigune.

As he rides away from the castle, wrapped in the sadness which had been forced upon him by the dreams of the night, he meets his cousin,

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whom he does not recognize at first because of her melancholy and forlorn appearance. She knows him, however, and questions him eagerly. When she learns that he must have been in the Grail castle, in the blessed interior of Monsalvat, she takes it for granted that he has asked the question and healed the suffering king. He learns then that he was destined for that noble service, and that his own conventional and self-conscious fear has prevented its performance.

When at last he interrupts the flood of her eloquence, and tells her that he has lost his opportunity and failed in his duty, Sigune cannot restrain her indignation, and her eager reproach in which she hurls at him the threat that for years the wolf's tooth shall gnaw his heart is naturally the suggestion for that marvellous cursing scene in Wagner's drama, where it seems as if all the powers of evil combine against the hapless boy, whom nevertheless they cannot

of Parsifal

overthrow. It is of course Kundry who curses / Parsifal in the drama, for Sigune is not introduced into the scene of the modern play.

The initial moment in the old epic is exceedingly fine, and in it we find what is really the key-note to the feeling of the entire poem, and the spiritual source from which the healing of Amfortas springs. Weary of invective, Sigune turns to Parzival with the words:

“ I should think your heart would have been so full of pity that you could not have helped asking the question.”

It was love that alone could heal the suffering monarch, and, if the love was not already springing in Parzival’s soul, the necessary words might tremble upon his tongue, but they could not fall from his hesitating lips. So he must wander for many years, gnawed by the wolf’s tooth of her scorn and his own profound regret, before the moment came when he could regain his lost opportunity.

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“It is likely,” she cried, “that it will be granted you! You were born to achieve the richest prize of chivalry, and you failed at Monsalvat!”

In all the Arthurian romances, the Knight Gawain fills a peculiar place. He is always described as a brave and fearless cavalier; he is frequently painted as noble and worthy of his high lineage, but he is as often represented quite devoid of honourable character and motives. He is drawn as a treacherous and recreant knight.

In Wolfram’s “Parzival,” however, his personality is well defined, and he is used constantly as the foil for Parzival’s honour and fine feeling. Parzival can never forget Sigune’s curse and his own wretched failure, which doomed the unfortunate king to longer years of suffering, but Gawain, though he has started upon the Grail quest, falls in love with that very Orzeluse who has been the king’s destruction, and

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invariably drops every high aim for the light and passing pleasure of the moment. He breaks the charm of the magic bed in the Wonder Castle, and frees the imprisoned maidens, but he does all as if by accident, and shows neither purpose nor ideal.

The two knights are powerfully contrasted in the scene at the round table, where both are unexpectedly accused of unknightly conduct in the presence of the king and his followers. Kondrie appears and tells the pathetic story of Parzival's failure to ask the question at the Grail castle, accusing him of cowardice and stupidity unworthy of a noble knight. Scarcely has she taken her departure when Kingrimursel presents himself, accuses Gawain of treachery and of "Judas" conduct, on account of which he challenges him to mortal combat.

Parzival stands dismayed and broken-hearted after Kondrie's cruel accusation. He feels as if the sacrifice of his entire life would not offer

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sufficient reparation for the fault he has committed. Gawain, on the contrary, is scarcely disturbed. He is anxious about his armour, that is all, and is careful to select shield and breastplate that can withstand heavy blows.

In his love for the false Orgeluse, also, Gawain is compared with true-hearted Parzival. Gawain yields himself completely to her wiles and the charm of her beauty, and she tells him of the one knight, a red knight all in red armour — for Parzival always wore the gear he had won from Ither in his first combat — who refused her love, and refused it though she offered him her land as well.

“I have a more beautiful wife than you,” he declared, “who is dearer to me than you could ever be. Besides, your love is nothing to me, for the Grail lies heavy on my heart.”

“So he spoke,” concluded Orgeluse, as she told the story to Gawain. “Now be my judge.

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Was I slighted by his scorn, or was he unworthy of the love I offered him so frankly?"

In spite of Gawain's lightness, he loved the noble character of Parzival, so he answered, with much seriousness, "Lady, the knight whom you fancied is so noble a man, that if he had loved you, even you would have been honoured by his preference."

It is deeply interesting to study the old poem of Wolfram, and realize how fully Wagner must have been penetrated by its richness and charm, to transform it as he has into the jewelled and brilliant texture of his great drama. For there is scarcely a clever dramatic point in Wagner's work, which is not suggested in different form in the elder masterpiece. For instance, the Kundry of the drama has been spoken of as practically the original creation of the later poet. Yet the entire character and conduct of Wagner's Kundry are fully delineated in Wolfram's Orgeluse. As has been

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shown, she has no influence upon Wolfram's Parzival, but she has been the ruin of Amfortas, and plays constantly into the hands of Klinschor by the ensnaring of noble cavaliers. Wagner's dramatic instinct led him to drop both Gawain and Orgeluse from his list of characters. He gives the rôle of Orgeluse to his own Kundry, and in her endeavour to ensnare Parsifal, and its result, he depicts all the struggle and development of the hero's soul.

Meanwhile, the hint which led him to invent the character of his own Kundry, or rather transform and repaint the Kondrie-Orgeluse of the epic, is found in the old poem itself. Kondrie seems to be a sort of Grail messenger in Wolfram's hands. She seeks Parzival, as has been shown, at the round table, and insults him, apparently for the good of his soul, and later leads him once more to the holy place. But she goes also to the Wonder Castle of Klinschor, and Queen Arnive tells Gawain,

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while she is dressing his wounds, how Kondrie la Sorcière has taught her wondrous things in the healing of wounds, for Kondrie is very wise.

We can see also, in the vivid and half-humourous description Wolfram gives of the indescribably horrible plainness of Kondrie, and her curiously rich attire, how Wagner gained from it the hint he needed to create his own strange and fascinating Kundry, who, during half her time, must be a beautiful, clever, and irresistible witch whom no man can resist, and for the remainder becomes a sorrowing woman who would save the poor souls her spell has bewildered!

It must not be supposed for a moment that Wagner's appropriation of the earlier epic was in the least open to criticism. He used it frankly as a portion of that rich, mythic treasure gathered in the development of the human race, to which all men have added, and

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from which all are free to take in their turn. It was his profound sympathy with everything the older poem contained which enabled him to transmute its contents with such remarkable effect.

Thus he would probably have thought of using the spear as a means of healing more dramatic than the simple question, even if Chrestien de Troyes had not done so in his poem of "Perchevaus," for the spear plays a very significant part in the epic, as well as in Wagner's drama.

When Parzival's wanderings bring him finally to the woodland cell of Trevrezent, where at last his soul shall find peace, he remembers that he has been there before, and recognizes the spear he sees as that of Duke Orilus, the husband of Jeschute, from whom he had torn the ring in his first adventure after leaving the forest.

One of the significant points in Parzival's

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development, as Wolfram describes it, is that he must always repent practically of his sins, that is, must make reparation for his wrong-doings, not to the Church, but to those he has injured. When he left Jeschute in tears and terror, he was by no means free from her. He meets her later, after he has been to Monsalvat, and wakened to a consciousness of his erring state, and finds, to his dismay, that since his encounter with her that fateful day, her husband has believed her untrue to him, and has treated her with cruelty. Parzival encounters Duke Orilus, conquers him, and makes him swear that hereafter he will deal gently with Jeschute. Then he goes with him to a forest retreat, where they find a holy reliquary, upon which Parzival swears a solemn oath that Jeschute is as innocent as the sunshine, and that when he took her jewels, and kissed her lips, he was "not yet a man," only a heedless fool. So Orilus is at last convinced. He wipes

⇒ The Legends

the blood from his combat-smitten lips, and kisses her warmly, not from compulsion. He also covers her with his warrior's mantle, slashed with many a hero's sword cut. Strange ornament for a fair lady! adds the old chronicler, but it was many a day since Jeschute had been honoured with the touch of its knightly folds.

Parzival left the happy pair in the hermit's cell, and went on to establish peace elsewhere upon the earth. Two years and a half later, he pauses in his wanderings at the door of the same cell, but he does not remember it until he suddenly recognizes the reliquary upon which he had sworn Jeschute's innocence, and the spear which Orilus must have left behind him.

“How long has that been here?” he asks the good hermit, and Trevrezent, referring to his prayer-book, where the event had been noted, gives him the months and days.

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Then Parzival realizes the weariness of the time he has wandered, separated from the wife he loves so dearly, unable to find the gray walls of Monsalvat, to see the blessed Grail once more, and heal the suffering king. But at least he has found some one to whom he can reveal all the burden of his sorrows, and understand in every detail the wonderful history of the Grail castle, and the wounded king.

We know how Parzival's heart contracted, and how fully he forgot his own sorrows as he was told of the poisoned spear which had inflicted the burning wound, and how the metal was so deadly cold that only when it was placed upon his fevered flesh was the king's pain for a moment assuaged! And he could have ended it for ever! Had he but forgotten his own foolish dignity, Amfortas would have spent the last five years in joy and happiness!

Then he was told of the comfort of the waters of the wide sea, by which the castle stood. The

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sufferer lay often in his boat, rocking upon the soft embrace of the waves, and the gentle breezes brought relief to his anguish. Ah, Parzival! And you could have given him sweet sleep for many years!

So the story goes on, until we seem to see how love has taken complete possession of the hero's soul, and he has even ceased to remember his own sorrows. He has lost them in the consciousness of another's deeper anguish. It is at such a moment that the elixir of the Grail enters the soul, and wise Trevrezent knew well what he was doing as he dwelt upon the details of the wonderful story in which his hearer was so intensely interested.

We see also how curiously Wagner has interwoven even the outer incidents of the epic into the scenic structure of his masterpiece. The spear which wounded Amfortas was not that of Calvary, and the spear preserved in Trevrezent's cell was not that which had wounded the



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king, yet each has reappeared transformed in the dramatic part the spear plays in the musician's hands, and the spear of Wagner was fashioned in the poetic fires of the older poet's laboratory.

In the drama the spear is always that with which Christ was wounded on Calvary. It wounds Amfortas in turn as a punishment for his passionate sin, then Klingsor hurls it at young Parsifal, when he dares resist the fascination of Kundry, and Parsifal, unterrified, catches it in its dangerous flight, makes with it the sign of the cross in the air, and with that holy symbol of love, breaks the spell of Klingsor's magic so that the beauties of his garden crumble into dust!

Then, when the Parsifal of Wagner, in his turn, reaches the term of his wanderings, his pain and purification, he finds Gurnemanz, as the elder Parzival found Trevrezent, and the hero is recognized by his spear. Gurnemanz

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has watched for his return, bearing it in his hand, because he knows that one day it will heal the king.

There are several specially beautiful situations in the three acts of Wagner's drama, into which he has compressed the wide compass of the rich old epic. Among these, the shooting of the swan naturally comes first, for in it we feel all the sweet forest rearing of the boy, and the peculiar innocence of his undeveloped state. The strange and mysterious charm of the castle of Monsalvat, its quiet waters, its peace, and the mystic suffering of its king, are all powerfully mirrored in this great initial scene of the drama. The boy's soul stirs and wakens at the death of the swan, as did that of Parzival at the death of the song-bird, and we know that, whatever mistakes he may regret hereafter, he will not turn an unlistening ear to the divine voice.

In the second act, the scene with Kundry is

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of the same comprehensive sort. Kundry knows the innocent heart of the boy whom she would ensnare in spite of herself, and she endeavours to rouse in him an ignoble love, by recalling to him the caressing fondness of his mother. So he is startled suddenly by his mother's voice calling him — “ Par-si-fal! Par-si-fal!” The lingering syllables, quivering with his mother's love, envelop him in a flood of tenderness. But such tenderness! It is the caress of the stars and the breezes of morning. It is an elixir so powerful that the poison of Kundry's kiss is incorporated in its current, and illuminates him suddenly with a knowledge of what Amfortas suffers. Ah! it was this which caused his pain! It was the bitter sting of passion. And he might have healed him! He, a foolish, inexperienced boy, might have saved the king! Parsifal springs to his feet in the anguish of the moment; the wiles of Kundry are as nothing, the magic of Klingsor is broken

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before the endless pity which beats and surges in the heart of the loving youth.

In the last act, the memory loves to dwell upon the baptism of Kundry, and the healing of Amfortas, for in these two scenes the symbolism of the poem finds its consummation, and the music naturally rises to its greatest power. In the healing of the suffering monarch, where the dove descends, and the king is touched with the wonderful spear, with which the imagination of the observer has become familiarized as an object of strange significance and potency, feeling is so intensified as to be almost unbearable, and the ethereal grace and benediction of the music express what can never be given form in words.

The descent of the dove is one of the beautiful touches which Wolfram had conceived, for Trevrezent describes to Parzival the wonderful uplift which all souls experience when the snowy dove flies from heaven, and leaves upon

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the marvellous stone its offering. From that gift arises the strange nourishing power of the Grail, he assures his reverent listener, so that until the dove again descends, all shall be fed upon ambrosia.

In Kundry, Wagner has combined the figures of Kondrie and Orgeluse, as has been said. In the treatment of the love theme in his drama, he has been accused on the one side of marked sentimentalism, and on the other of extreme artificiality, but neither is true. It would have been impossible for him to study the old poem with the sympathy he felt for its theme, and not become to a certain extent a symbolist. But he was a symbolist from temperament, as was Wolfram before him, so that we cannot understand anything he did, if we refuse to recognize his symbolism.

The theme of "Parsifal" is spiritual love; the finding of the Grail is the awakening of the soul to this love, and while the entire life of

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the hero paints the evolution of his nature from animal consciousness to spiritual love and wisdom, as it may be attained in each human soul, the figure of Kundry illustrates what one might denominate the struggle of love. Kundry has been forced, by the magic spell of Klingsor, to rouse the passions of men, and ensnare and ruin them thereby. Her soul is awakened, and she wishes, on the contrary, to save and heal them. Her contact with Parsifal has taught her the meaning of pure love. She begins to understand the love of Heaven by experiencing the pure love of man. It was impossible for the dramatist to paint the entire evolution of Parzival's spirit, so he illustrates in Kundry's love, and its result, what Wolfram shows in his hero's long constancy for Kondwiramur.

In the epic, Parzival's visit to Trevrezent marks his entrance upon the path which will lead him again to Monsalvat, and enable him

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to heal the king. He stays two weeks with the old hermit, whom he learns is his uncle, the brother of Amfortas, and also of Herzeleide; for Parzival knows at last that he really belongs to the Grail family. The simple life of prayer and fasting, the long and loving talks with the saintly hermit, melt the bitterness in Parzival's heart, and he begins to believe that he has not lost God, that in fact he may still make good that sad lack of love, of which he had once been guilty.

So he said farewell to the hermit with a cheerful and comforted soul, and rode away to Arthur's court, to realize, to his surprise, that he was honoured there as the greatest knight in the world. For, while Parzival had been righting his own mistakes, and succouring the unfortunate, he had been altogether too busy to notice that men called him great, and declared he was without a peer in the world of chivalry!

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It was just at this time, also, that he found his half-brother Feirifisz, who was the son of that Saracen wife his father had married in his youth. The young man would have been called a heathen, but Parzival took him to his heart without asking if he had been baptized, and one wonders, in reading the story, that Wolfram, who lived in the crusading days of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, has limned for us the character of Feirifisz with so genial a touch.

The moment arrived at last when Parzival was again seated at the banquet-table of Arthur, surrounded by the members of that famous band whose names still thrill us with the memory of their prowess and noble deeds. The day was Parzival's, the banquet in his honour, and once more Kondrie rode into the hall. But this time she came not to assail Parzival and fill his soul with gloom, but to bring him honour and joy, to conduct him to Monsalvat. Do

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you believe he could hesitate to obey the summons? All the glory of the world was about him, clothed him, its plaudits and titles were thrust upon him, but he pushed them from him eagerly, with joy, to enter the presence of divine and perfect love! But how could he do anything else? There are so few of us who can understand even the first syllable of the meaning of love in this short life of ours, and Parzival knew that now he was to learn it, the entire definition, even to its concluding letter, as far as the human mind could contain its infinite beauty.

Kondrie told him that he had the privilege of taking one companion with him, and he immediately chose Feirifisz; he was a heathen, but he was a brother, and evidently Parzival was more than ready for the first syllable of love! They rode at a swift pace across the country, and stood soon in the presence of the suffering king. You can be certain that his

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greeting was a glad one; but Amfortas begged that the stranger would not remain in the Grail chamber, and we are reminded of the tradition that no one could perceive the Grail who had not been baptized. Surely, we confess immediately, one must believe in God, and incline the ear with humility to hear his voice, or it will not be audible. The fragrance of the Grail and its illuminating vision can only be apprehended by the supersensitive consciousness of the awakened soul.

We like to remember that, after Feirifisz was baptized, he married no less a person than Répanse de Schoie herself, who had borne the Grail at Monsalvat so many years that certainly nothing but sweet wisdom could have remained in her beautiful, earthly tabernacle. None but a singularly broad-minded Christian poet of the thirteenth century could have wedded her to one who was born and bred a Saracen. The stranger must have caught the accents of the

of Parzival

Grail in his Arabic tongue to cherish them in his loving and earnest heart! Otherwise he could not have sought his wife in the castle of Monsalvat.

We realize in this little incident that Wolfram had recognized the widespread influence of the Grail. It speaks in all tongues, whispers in all hearts, is the mystic chain of union for mankind. No race is so lost in savagery as not to be lifted into the radiance of its vision.

When Feirifisz had left his brother with the king, Parzival did not wait for the great procession, for the opening of the sliding walls, or the performance of any ceremonial. He begged only that he might see the Grail, that he might be granted an assurance of the reality of his mission. But he could scarcely speak to ask the all-important question; his voice broke in its utterance of the simple words, and the cause of the miracle was evident, for truly Parzival could not help asking the question!

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The healing love-spirit, which fills the narration of Wolfram, and renders the simplicity of his description exceedingly eloquent, has coloured and inspired the music of Wagner in this scene, so that it heightens and interprets the effect of the healing, as words could not do. When Parsifal lifts the crystal cup, and it is illuminated by a shaft of crimson light, as the white dove descends, the scene is as perfect in its varied aspect as could well be imagined. All the avenues to the senses are filled by those delicate and lovely sensations which we associate with experiences of the soul, and the bodily nerves are forced to convey only impressions which we call those of heaven, because they are so far removed from the region of our passion and pain.

It will be evident to any one who compares the drama with the epic, that Wagner has not given us "a Schopenhauer set to music," as some of the critics have declared. He took his

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materials from all sources. The crystal cup, which is so effective as it is illuminated by crimson light, is described in the "Krone," by Heinrich von dem Turlin. The lance, or spear, which is usually the traditional and legendary one of Loginus, outside of Wolfram's hands, played a more prominent part in the mediæval romances of France and Germany than in those of the great minstrel. The dove, the chalice, the fragrance and miraculous qualities of the Grail appear in all the legends, but only in the minds of Wolfram and his mighty successor are all these heavenly gifts used for the illustration of a spiritual truth.

The extent and manner in which Wagner was influenced by Schopenhauer is not understood by many critics. The great idealist philosopher is not necessarily a pessimist, and did not make Wagner one. He realized fully — as a philosopher merely — that the sensitive thinking side of life represents its only reality,

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and offers the only possibility of happiness for mankind of a permanent and positive sort. To this we can only attain by the elimination of selfishness, and it is selfish desire, not love of the beautiful and of one's kind and kin, which his teaching would destroy. The "will to live" which craves physical gratification, sumptuous dinners and great wealth, personal power, must be granted no empire in the aspiring soul, but a "will to live" which demands the salvation of the world, homes for the people, happiness in every heart,—that is what allies man to God himself. In this way the idealist teaching of Schopenhauer strengthened Wagner's own interest in all questions which touch upon the brotherhood of men, and rendered him doubly sympathetic to the emphasis of Wolfram von Eschenbach in such directions.

We know almost nothing of the old poet himself. He has told us he was of peasant birth, and intimates that he was so little skilled

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in books as to be ignorant of reading and writing. But this can hardly be true. The poem bears every evidence of having been sung and not written, and it was no doubt preserved as the minstrel sang it with the accompaniment of his harp. It is full of charming humourous touches, and descriptive and philosophic additions, which would have been excluded from a "clerkly" manuscript, such as the poet evidently scorned, but rose most naturally as confidences between the improvisator and a sympathetic audience. They express the character of the man better than a biography, and explain the singular charm which the poem retains for all students of its original.

Wolfram had travelled much. He had visited that fascinating city of Toulouse, which was the most cultured and liberal centre of the world in his day. He had won knighthood and position through his achievements in arms and poetry, — one can hardly say "letters," — and

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he speaks throughout his work as a singularly independent and sympathetic observer of life. It is this which has given his production so marked an individuality that the German critics speak of Wolfram as essentially the stylist in the group of poets to which he belongs.

He married and lived modestly with his wife and one child. He never attained much wealth, and certainly would not have cared to possess it. He was so cheerful a mystic that the luxuries of life would have troubled him more than they rejoiced him.

Such a temperament must necessarily have appealed to a poet like Richard Wagner, and he returned again and again to Wolfram's "Parzival," until at last his decision was taken, and he wrote the lines of his own drama in 1876, though it was not published before 1877. The music was more slowly committed to paper, so that it was not ready for the orchestra until 1882. This was not because it was in any way

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disconnected with the text. Wagner declared once that he always heard his music while he composed his poem, and never forgot it. But in this instance there were many distractions which rendered it difficult for him to get his notes upon paper. He could hardly have written it earlier, since it was expressive of the new peace which had entered his life.

Wagner was born in 1813, and did not form the connection with King Ludwig of Bavaria until 1864, when he was fifty-one years old. Up to that time he had very nearly completed the work of his life, with practically no evidence of worldly appreciation or recognition. Even at the period of his death, he was not free from financial anxiety, but the patronage and sympathetic support of the king relieved him from the distress of actual poverty, and assured him an income.

The king's friendship also gave him a position before the world which he could not have

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attained otherwise, and brought him the second marriage that surrounded him for the first time in his experience with an atmosphere of sweet comprehension and that intimate companionship which means so much to the artist. His wife and his home henceforth formed a happy centre for his work.

All this enabled him to realize more fully in feeling the theories he had held, and so he wrote the "victor drama," which was a most appropriate conclusion to the series he had dedicated to what might be termed the struggle of the ideal in its relations with human life. His cup of bitterness had been pressed very full. He had experienced all Parzival's anguish; he had been at Monsalvat, and had failed to ask the question, and it was but fit that at last he should be permitted to reign for a little while in the Grail castle.

It could not have been an accident that in the last tempestuous years of the wonderful nine-

of *Parzifal* &

teenth century the Grail ideal was given outward shape once more, and this time in a form which made it the vehicle of public production before the eyes of men, the illustrator of perfection in the three great lines of music, art, and the drama. The sweet and heavenly conception of the poet of the thirteenth century has been realized again through the brain of a lover of his kind, and has been spoken to us with such eloquence that we cannot forget it.

We remember that in all ages the fragrance of the Grail has lingered about the senses of man; the poet has felt it; the ecstasy of the prophet has perceived it; men have sought it, have found it, have not despaired even when they lost it. In the wonderful present, with its gigantic contrasts, its lightning progress and unique opportunity, it seems sometimes as if the day of achievement had arrived, and we should throw wide the gates of the Grail castle for all men. The knight of the Grail is among us, we

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hear his voice, we see the light of his eye, and the world listens as never before to his message, knowing for the first time what it means when love enters life.



THE END.

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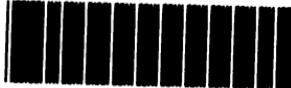
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